

IDEAS AND CONTENT

5 This paper is clear, focused, and persuasive. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant anecdotes and details enrich the main idea.

- The writer expresses his/her opinion in a convincing manner by providing ample support.
- The writer shows insight and has a good sense of how ideas connect with one another.
- The writing has balance. A main idea stands out; secondary ideas do not usurp too much attention.
- The writer seems to be in control, and orchestrates development of the topic in an enlightening, or entertaining way.
- The writer acknowledges other opinions about the subject and may attempt to refute them. [9th grade]

4 The paper is clear, focused, and persuasive. It begins to pique the reader's interest. Support is adequate and reinforces the main idea.

- The writer expresses his/her opinion in a somewhat convincing manner by providing adequate supporting reasons.
- The writer shows some understanding of the ways ideas interconnect.
- The writing is balanced. A main idea is present, and secondary details generally support the main idea.
- The writer moves from general observation to specific points with ease.
- The writer seems to be in control and has sufficiently defined the topic.
- The writer may acknowledge other opinions about the subject, but may or may not attempt to refute them. [9th grade]

3 The paper is clear and focused, even though the overall result may not be especially persuasive. Support is attempted, but it may be limited, insubstantial, or too general.

- The writer expresses his/her opinion, but does not provide enough supporting reasons to be very convincing.
- The writer has difficulty going from general observations to specific points or useful insights.
- The writer seems to have considered ideas about this topic only superficially.
- Ideas, though reasonably clear, often tend toward the mundane.
- The writer is beginning to define the topic, but control is sporadic.
- The writer may indirectly acknowledge other opinions on the subject. [9th grade]

2 The paper has a main idea or purpose but lacks focus. Support is less than adequate to develop the main idea fully.

- The writer states his/her opinion, but provides only minimal supporting reasons that are not convincing.
- Information is limited or is merely a collection of facts and details.
- The writer has made an attempt to define the topic but shows little control of the material.
- Development is weak; the paper lacks sufficient information.
- The writer does not acknowledge other opinions on the subject. [9th grade]

1 The paper lacks a main idea or purpose, or forces the reader to make inferences based on very sketchy details.

- The writer's opinion is not clearly evident, although there may be some indication of a preferred position on the subject.
- Information is very limited or simply unclear.
- Attempts at development may be minimal or may clutter up the text with random thoughts from which no main idea emerges.
- The writer has not begun to define the topic in any meaningful or personal way.
- The writer does not acknowledge other opinions on the subject. [9th grade]

ORGANIZATION

5 The organization enhances and showcases the main idea. The order, structure, and presentation move the reader nicely through the text.

- An inviting introduction draws the reader in, and a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of completeness.
- Details seem to fit where they are placed.
- Transitions are smooth and weave the separate threads of meaning into one cohesive whole.
- The writing is well balanced and moves along smoothly.
- Organization flows so smoothly that the reader may not be conscious of organizational patterns or structure unless looking for them.

4 The organization is effective, and the presentation is efficient. The overall structure moves the reader through the text.

- The introduction and conclusion are functional and connected to the main idea.
- Details are generally well-placed, and relevant to the main idea.
- Transitions work well and connections are natural and appropriate.
- The writing has balance and consistently moves along at a good pace.
- Organization helps to convey the main idea.

3 The reader can readily follow what is being said, but the overall organization may sometimes be ineffective or too obvious.

- The introduction and conclusion are recognizable, though not so well-crafted or well connected to the main idea as the reader might wish.
- Placement or relevance of details is occasionally confusing.
- Transitions sometimes work well; at other times, the connections between ideas seem forced or inappropriate.
- The paper sometimes moves along at a good pace, but at other times bogs down in trivia or speeds along too rapidly.
- Despite problems, the organization does not seriously get in the way of the main idea.

2 Overall organization is emerging and provides some signs of development. The writing may begin to show direction, but ideas and/or details are limited.

- An introduction and conclusion may be present, but are not necessarily connected to the main idea.
- Details are beginning to contribute to the main idea.
- Transitions are weak; connections between ideas are difficult to discern.
- The paper begins to show a sense of pacing, but the reader is not easily led from point to point.
- Organization may be present, but is weak.

1 Organization is haphazard and disjointed. The writing lacks direction; the ideas and/or details are loosely connected.

- There may be no clearly identifiable introduction or conclusion.
- Details often serve only to confuse the reader or to fill space; they do not contribute to the main idea.
- Transitions are very weak, leaving connections between ideas fuzzy, incomplete, or bewildering.
- Noticeable gaps in information confuse the reader.
- Pacing is consistently awkward, so that the reader feels either mired down in irrelevant trivia or rushed along.
- Lack of organization ultimately obscures or distorts the main idea of the text.

VOICE

5 The writer speaks directly to the audience in a way that is individualistic, expressive, and engaging. Clearly, the writer is involved in the topic and is writing to be read.

- The writer is willing to take some risks.
- The paper has the ring of conviction.
- The language is natural; it brings the topic to life.
- The reader feels a strong sense of interaction with the writer and senses the person behind the words.
- The projected tone and voice clarify and give flavor to the writer's message.

4 The writer is genuine and is generally involved in the topic. There is some evidence that the writer addresses the audience.

- The writer seems willing to take some risks.
- The reader feels some connection with the writer and begins to get a sense of the writer.
- The tone is appropriate and fits the topic, purpose, and audience.
- Voice emerges and rarely shifts or disappears into indistinct language.

3 The writer seems sincere but not fully involved in the topic. The result is pleasant, acceptable, sometimes even personable, but not compelling. The writer may or may not directly address the audience.

- The writer seems to weigh words carefully to avoid risk, and to write what he or she thinks the reader wants to hear.
- The writing tends to hide rather than reveal the writer.
- The writing communicates in an earnest but fairly routine manner.
- Voice may emerge strongly on occasion, only to shift or disappear a line or two later behind a facade of general or vague language.

2 The writer attempts involvement with the topic, but seems unaware of an audience. Although the writing is somewhat on target, it is often predictable and unemotional.

- The reader has little sense of the writer behind the words.
- The writing communicates on a functional level.
- Voice may begin to emerge, but the language is insubstantial and unconvincing.
- Delivery lacks individuality and conviction; the reader has only hints of the message.

1 The writer seems wholly indifferent, uninvolved, or dispassionate about the topic and is unaware of an audience. As a result, the writing is flat, lifeless, stiff, or mechanical.

- The reader has no sense of the writer behind the words and no sense of a real desire on the part of the writer to communicate.
- The writer seems to speak in a kind of monotone that flattens all potential highs or lows of the message.
- The writing communicates on a functional level.
- Delivery is so consistently flat that the reader may find it hard to focus on the message even when the wording seems reasonably clear and correct.

WORD CHOICE

5 Words convey the intended message in an interesting, precise, and natural way. The writing is full and rich, yet concise.

- Words are specific and accurate: they seem just right.
- Imagery is strong.
- Powerful verbs give the writing energy.
- Vocabulary may be striking, but it's natural, and never overdone.
- Expression is fresh and appealing; slang is used sparingly.

4 Words convey the message in a realistic and reasonable way. The writing is usually clear and easy to interpret, but not always succinct.

- The words are correct and adequate, but rarely striking.
- Imagery is present, but not powerful.
- Verbs are fresh and occasionally strike a spark.
- Vocabulary is natural, but at times overdone.
- The writer experiments with uncommon words and generally uses them effectively.

3 The language is quite ordinary and functional, but it does convey the message. Often, the writer settles for what's easy or handy, producing a sort of generic paper stuffed with familiar words and phrases.

- The language communicates, but rarely captures the reader's imagination. While the overall meaning is quite clear, the wording lacks precision.
- Imagery often depends on the reader's own knowledge of the topic.
- A few key verbs may liven things up, but equally often, flat language robs the text of power.
- The writer rarely experiments with language; yet, the paper may have some fine moments.
- Attempts at colorful or poetic language often seem overdone and calculated to impress the reader.
- Cliches, redundancies, and overused phrases are commonly used.

2 The writer makes some effort to use the right words to express meaning, but the language is

- superficial and nonspecific.
- Words are generally colorless or abstract.
- Imagery may appear periodically, but is often confusing.
- Verbs are repetitive and dull.
- Tired phrases inhibit clarity and creativity.
- Words occasionally fit the text, but they lack flair.

1 The writer struggles with a limited vocabulary, groping for words to convey meaning. Often the language is so vague and abstract or so redundant that only the broadest, most general sort of message comes through.

- Words are consistently dull, colorless, or abstract. There is little for the reader to grasp.
- The imagery is confusing or absent altogether. The text is filled with generalities.
- Verbs are weak and few in number; is, are, was, and were dominate.
- Monotonous repetition or reliance on worn expressions clouds or smothers the message.
- Often words simply do not fit the text. They seem imprecise, inadequate, or just plain wrong.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

5 The writing has an easy flow and rhythm when read aloud. Sentences are consistently well-crafted with a varied structure that makes expressive oral reading easy and enjoyable.

- Sentence structure strongly reflects a logic that shows how the ideas are interrelated.
- The writing sounds natural and fluent; it glides along with effective phrasing, one sentence flowing effortlessly into the next.
- Writing is appropriately concise, yet not terse. Sentences display an effective combination of power and grace.
- Sentences vary in structure and length, adding interest to the text.
- Fragments, if used at all, work well.

4 The writing has some rhythm that flows throughout most of the text when read aloud.

- Generally, the sentences are well-crafted.
- Sentence structure usually reflects a logic that conveys the relationship between ideas.
- The writing moves along at a fairly consistent pace.
- The writer shows control of both simple and complex syntax.
- Sentences typically vary in structure and length, making the reading pleasant.
- Fragments, if used, usually work well.

3 Sentences tend to be mechanical and lack rhythm. Sometimes awkward sentence construction forces the reader to slow down or reread.

- Sentence structure sometimes conveys the relationship between ideas, and sometimes does not. The connections between phrases or sentences may not be very effective.
- The writer shows good control with simple sentence structure, but variable control over complex syntax.
- Sentences sometimes vary in length or structure, but for the most part the writer falls into a pattern and sticks with it.
- Fragments, if used, sometimes work but generally seem to be the result of oversight.
- Sentences, though functional, often lack style.
- Some parts of the text invite expressive oral reading; others may be a bit stilted.

2 The paper is generally difficult to follow or read orally. Sentences are occasionally complete but are usually mechanical and flawed.

- Nonstandard English syntax may appear on occasion.
- Fragments and awkward sentence construction may disrupt the flow of the text.
- Some sentences are short and choppy and are frequently tedious to read.
- Word patterns are usually repetitive and demonstrate a limited familiarity with sentence patterns.
- Few parts of the text generate expressive oral reading.

- 1** The paper is difficult to follow or to read aloud. Sentences tend to be choppy, incomplete, or awkward.
- Nonstandard English syntax is used.
 - Sentence structure does not generally enhance meaning. In fact, it may obscure meaning.
 - Most sentences seem disjointed, awkward, or confusing.
 - Word patterns are often monotonous (e.g., subject-verb or subject-verb-object).
 - The text does not generally permit expressive oral reading.

CONVENTIONS

- 5** The writer demonstrates a good grasp of standard writing conventions,* and uses them effectively to enhance readability. Errors tend to be so few and so minor that the reader can easily skim right over them.
- Grammar and usage are correct and contribute to clarity and style.
 - Punctuation is smooth, so it guides the reader through the text.
 - Spelling is generally correct, even on more difficult words.
 - The writer may manipulate conventions—particularly grammar—for stylistic effect.
 - The writing is sufficiently long and complex to allow the writer to show skill in using a wide range of conventions.
 - Paragraphing tends to be sound and to reinforce the organizational structure.
- 4** The writer demonstrates an overall grasp of standard writing conventions,* and generally uses them to enhance readability. Errors are minor.
- Grammar and usage are generally correct and usually contribute to clarity and style.
 - Punctuation is relatively smooth, generally enabling the reader to flow through the text.
 - Spelling is correct on common words but not consistent on difficult words.
 - The writing shows thorough control over a limited range of conventions.
 - The writing is fairly long but not very complex.
 - Paragraphing is generally correct, usually beginning in the right places.
- 3** Errors in standard writing conventions,* while not overwhelming, begin to impair readability. Although errors do not block meaning, they tend to be distracting.
- Terminal (end-of-sentence) punctuation is almost always correct; internal punctuation, however, may be incorrect or missing altogether.
 - Spelling is usually correct, or reasonably phonetic, on common words.
 - Problems with usage are not severe enough to distort meaning.
 - The writer may show reasonable control over a very limited range of conventions, but the text may be too simple or too short to reflect real mastery of conventions.
 - Errors in all areas tend to show some consistency; for example, the writer may misspell a word the same way throughout the text.
 - Paragraphing may be inconsistent. Paragraphs sometimes run together or begin in the wrong places.

2 Frequent errors in standard writing conventions* distract the reader, making the text generally difficult to read.

- The writer shows limited skill in using conventions.
- Frequent errors in basic punctuation appear throughout the paper.
- Spelling errors often appear, even on common words, and are not usually phonetic.
- Paragraphing is erratic and unconventional, and detracts from the organizational structure of the text.

1 Numerous errors in standard writing conventions* repeatedly distract the reader, making the text difficult to read. In fact, the severity and the frequency of errors are so overwhelming that the reader finds it very difficult to focus on the message and must reread for meaning.

- The writer shows very limited skill in using conventions.
- Basic punctuation (including terminal punctuation) tends to be omitted, haphazard, or incorrect.
- Spelling errors are frequent, even on common words, and are not always phonetic.
- Paragraphing may be highly irregular, absent altogether, or so frequent that it bears no relation to the organizational structure of the text.

*Note: Standard writing conventions refers to the English language conventions in grammar, capitalization, punctuation, usage, spelling, and paragraphing. The criteria for correct usage should be considered in terms of the student's grade level.